

LIS 590AB* /ENGL 564** : 20th-Century American Bestsellers

Spring 2006

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Class Meetings: LIS 109, W 4:00pm-5:50pm

Office hours: 3:30pm-5pm Monday, LIS 112A, and by appointment

[Sakai Site](#)

[Search the Bestsellers Database](#)

[Reading Radar -- current New York Times Bestsellers](#)

* Advanced Problems in LIS, Topic: 20th Century American Bestsellers

** Seminar in Literary Modes and Genres

[Browse the Bestsellers
Database](#)

[Choose a Bestseller
\(access restricted\)](#)

Bestseller Lists by Decade:

1900-1909	1910-1919	1920-1929	1930-1939	1940-1949
1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979	1980-1989	1990-1999

Course Description:

In this course, we will use bestselling 20th-century American literature as a means of understanding publishing, bibliography, and popular culture in 20th-century America. This semester, the assigned reading will focus on representations of Christian religion in popular 20th-century novels, and we will read bestselling novels on this subject and analyze the causes and components of their popularity. Supplementary reading will focus on the publishing industry and the profession of authorship in America. Students will choose a title from the bestsellers database at the beginning of the semester, read that book, and contribute into the database five assignments: a bibliographic description of a first edition, a publishing history, a reception history, a biographical sketch, and a critical essay. Assigned reading will be the basis of the midterm and final exam.

Required Reading:

Readings should be completed by the dates specified in the schedule below.

- Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The One Woman* (#9 in 1903; film version in [1918](#))
[1-4191-7618-8 about \$25 Kessinger Publishing Company]
[Project Gutenberg Free Etext](#)
- Winston Churchill, *The Inside of the Cup* (#1 in 1913; film version in [1921](#))
[1-59540-139-3 \$10.95 1st World Publishing]
[Project Gutenberg Free Etext](#)
- Sinclair Lewis, *Elmer Gantry* (#1 in 1927; film version in [1960](#))
[0-451-52251-6 \$7.95 Penguin]
- Lloyd C. Douglas, *The Robe* (#1 in 1943, #2 in 1944 and 1945, #1 in 1953; film version in [1953](#))
[0-395-95775-3 \$14.00 Houghton Mifflin]
- Morris L. West, *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (#1 in 1963; film version in [1968](#))
[1-902881-83-4 \$14.95 Toby Press]
- ♦ Richard Bach, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* (#1 in 1972 and 1973; film version in [1978](#))
[0-380-01286-3 \$6.99 Avon Books]
- ♦ Carl Sagan, *Contact* (#7 in 1985; film version in [1997](#))
[0-671-00410-7 \$7.99 Simon & Schuster]
- Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (not counted as trade fiction; straight to video in [2000](#))
[1-4143-0540-0 \$14.99 Tyndale House Publishers]

A linked title indicates full text of the novel is available online. ♦ next to a title indicates that a completed entry already exists for this book in the bestsellers database: if such an entry exists, it should be considered required reading.

Assignments:

See: [Grading Policy](#)

Students will be required to submit a series of assignments into the bestsellers database during the semester, focused on a single best-seller (chosen from the lists of bestsellers by decade, above, but not a book that has already been chosen by someone else, nor any of the required readings for the course). These assignments will comprise a bibliographical description of a first edition, a publication history (including performances in other media, if any), a biographical sketch of the author, a reception history, and a critical analysis of the work in its cultural and literary contexts. All of these assignments will be submitted online, using Web-based submission forms: they will become part of an ongoing project to compile a [Web-accessible database of information about bestselling 20th-century American literature](#).

*For each database assignment, students **must** also submit a list of the sources consulted in completing each subsection of that assignment, whether **or not** the source produced information.* These sources can be submitted through the Sakai site, or by email to the instructor, or in hard copy. Please do include the

names of sources that produced information for a particular assignment in the database submission as well.

In addition to the database assignments, students will work in small groups to present each of the books that we read in common. These presentations must provide an overview of the following:

1. History and cultural significance of the book's publisher
2. Analysis of how this book relates to the theme that connects all the books we read in common, and what it tells us about that aspect of American culture and current events at the time of its publication
3. Points of connection on the fiction or non-fiction lists around the same time

Presentations may also include:

1. Highlights or oddities of the book's publication history
2. Highlights or oddities of the book's reception
3. Highlights or oddities of the author's biography

Schedule:

Due Dates	Submission Forms	Help Docs
January 18	First class meeting: Pre-registered students must attend (or lose priority).	
January 25	Choose a bestseller to work on for the five database assignments	
February 1	Finish Dixon, <i>The One Woman</i> for today. Presentation by Nectoux, Stille, Suni	
February 8	Finish Churchill, <i>The Inside of the Cup</i> for today. Presentation by Doskey, Trolard, DeBrock	
February 15	Assignment 1: Bibliographical Description	Submit Sources to unsworth@uiuc.edu Help Documentation and Examples for Assignment 1
February 22	Finish Lewis, <i>Elmer Gantry</i> for today. Presentation by Gilmore, Fuller, Sledge	
March 1	Assignment 2: Publication and Performance History	Submit Sources to unsworth@uiuc.edu Help Documentation and Examples for Assignment 2
March 8	Finish Douglas, <i>The Robe</i> for today. Presentation by Goodhue , Holguin	
March 15	Receive Take-Home Midterm. Movie Day (Elmer Gantry , 1960)	
March 22	Spring Break	

March 29	Take-Home Midterm Due in class today. Finish West, <i>The Shoes of the Fisherman</i> for today. Presentation by Schar, Oliverio		
April 5	Assignment 3: Biographical Sketch of the Author	Submit Sources to unsworth@uiuc.edu	Help Documentation and Examples for Assignment 3
April 12	Finish Bach, <i>Jonathan Livingston Seagull</i> Presentation by Optie , Peeples and Sagan, <i>Contact</i> Presentation by Johnson, Unger		
April 19	Assignment 4: Reception History	Submit Sources to unsworth@uiuc.edu	Help Documentation and Examples for Assignment 4
April 26	Finish LaHoye & Jenkins, <i>Left Behind</i> for today. Presentation by Filkins, Hommel		
May 3	Assignment 5: Critical Analysis	Submit Sources to unsworth@uiuc.edu	Help Documentation and Examples for Assignment 5
May 10	Final Exam, 7-10 PM		
Any Time	Add Supplementary Materials	Help on Formatting Entries	
Any Time	Update Assignments or Supplementary Materials		

[Web Resources](#)

[Sakai Class Site](#)

[Theme-Related Reading](#)

[Library Resources](#)

[Supplemental Reading](#)

[Credits and Acknowledgements](#)

[Rave Reviews: Bestselling Fiction in America](#)

An interview describing this class (from the MLA's radio show "What's the Word") downloadable in [in MP3 format](#) (7.3 MB) or as streaming audio, [in RealAudio format](#)

[Bestsellers](#)
[Graduate School of Library and Information Science](#)
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